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"Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by United Nations Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Access to clean cooking energy is a critical global gender issue cutting across several Beijing Platform for Action areas of concern; it is especially important for achieving success in the areas of (1) women and health, (2) women and poverty, (3) women and the environment, and (4) women and the economy.

Daily, millions of women and girls around the world breathe in harmful smoke while cooking and spend hours walking far distances to secure cooking fuel. Exposure to household air pollution from dangerous, inefficient, and polluting cooking practices kills over 4 million people annually, while millions more suffer from cancer, pneumonia, heart and lung disease, blindness, and burns (World Health Organization 2012). 3 billion people, or 40 per cent of the world, relies on traditional use of biomass for cooking. The rural poor, mostly women, largely only have access to fuels that are inefficient in converting to energy (International Center for Research on Women 2010).

In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the lack of access to clean cooking solutions is particularly significant, with a third of the urban population and the vast majority of the rural poor using solid fuels to cook their daily meals over open fires or inefficient stoves. Lack of access to cooking fuel forces women and children to spend many hours gathering fuel — up to 5 hours per day — or spend significant household income purchasing fuel. Women provide 91 per cent of households' total efforts in collecting fuel and water (Mehretu and Mutambira 1992), and women have an average working day of 11-14 hours, compared to 10 hours on average for men (ENERGIA 2006). A reduction in time spent collecting fuel and cooking enables women to spend more time with their children, complete other responsibilities, enhance existing economic opportunities, pursue income-generating or educational opportunities, and/or for leisure activities and rest — all of which contribute to poverty alleviation. A recent study in South Asia, commissioned by the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, showed that women who adopted improved cookstoves reported sending their children to school more often, decreased drudgery, improved health, and time savings (Practical Action 2014).

Additionally, reliance on biomass for cooking contributes to climate change, deforestation, soil erosion, and 26 per cent of global black carbon emissions (US Environmental Protection Agency 2012). Rural women are especially vulnerable to these environmental impacts. As forests are depleted, the energy burden increases and women are forced to walk even further to collect fuel or use more toxic fuels, such as dung or trash. This increased labour is almost always unpaid and uncounted as formal labour.

While women are disproportionately impacted by these issues, they are not just victims. They play a crucial role in the widespread adoption and use of clean household cooking solutions because of their central responsibility for managing household energy and cooking. As consumers and users, women are a critical component of the sector's effort to reach scale. Women must be fully integrated into the process of designing products and solutions because without their opinions and input, products will not meet their needs and will not be used.

Women can catalyse the market as clean energy entrepreneurs by leading efforts that seek to develop effective, culturally-appropriate, and sustainable solutions. A recent Kenyan study by Johns Hopkins University found that women

cookstove entrepreneurs sold 3 times many cookstoves as their male peers when given the same level of training and support (Shankar et al 2014). This research demonstrated that women can effectively become engaged as cookstove entrepreneurs and, in fact, may be preferred candidates for this type of work. Additionally, women's networks can provide access to consumers in hard-to-reach markets and women distributors can better understand the needs of women and more easily approach their clients (Batiwala and Reddy, 1996).

The Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves is working to ensure that cookstove and fuel enterprises utilize gender-informed business models in order to ensure effectiveness and sustainability, as well as strengthen and scale gender and empowerment impacts. Best practices and tools for engaging women and addressing gender issues can be found in the Alliance's Resource Guide on Scaling Adoption of Clean Cooking Solutions through Women's Empowerment.

Although stakeholders have decades of implementation experience and hundreds of organizations are active in the sector, enterprises have not adequately leveraged opportunities to empower women throughout the value chain, as well as leveraged their strengths and contributions to scaling the clean cooking sector. Resources are needed to develop effective business models that empower women and utilize women's entrepreneurship in the household energy sector, and advance the sector through the exchange of game-changing ideas and lessons learned from successful and failed innovations.

Finance and capacity building support for enterprises are also necessary to scale the number of women entrepreneurs and strengthen empowerment impacts. Agency-based empowerment training can significantly increase women's capacity to engage effectively within the clean cooking value chain (Shankar et al 2014). Additionally, evaluation and knowledge-sharing are critical in order to ensure the replication of effective business models for creating, sustaining, and scaling gender-informed approaches, women's entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment.

Many gains have been made over the past 20 years for women and girls, but they remain on the frontlines — the first responders to some of life's most difficult and dangerous moments. They are the first to feel the impacts of poverty — which is exacerbated by not having access to household energy. They are the first to be removed from school if firewood collection needs to be done, who walk farther and farther distances carrying extremely heavy loads when deforestation occurs, and are forced to inhale the thick toxic smoke emitted during cooking.